

# The Freethinker

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A FEW WEEKS ago I wrote an article entitled "Christian Apologetics", in which I cited the opinion of the most authoritative Roman Catholic theologian, the "Angelic Doctor", St. Thomas Aquinas, that heretics who adhere in their heresy ought not to be argued with but should be immediately put to death. The object of my reference was to indicate that while St. Thomas is the leading apologist for theism, when it came to the point of arguing with heretics, he did not appear to have much confidence in the efficacy of his own case. Surely an obvious deduction.

Enter Fr. Paris

Soon after the publication of the above article, I was much pleased, though I must confess, a trifle surprised in these circumstances, to receive a letter from Malta written and signed by the Rev. Fr. G. M. Paris, OP, (Dominican editor of the Maltese paper, *The Faith*). I have, I think, had the pleasure of crossing swords (naturally only verbally) with Fr. Paris before, as with Fr. Christie, SJ, Sir Arnold Lunn, the editor of *The Tablet*, and a number of other Roman Catholic champions at different times in the past. But whilst I am always gratified that my modest contributions to THE FREETHINKER are taken so seriously by reputable Roman Catholic apologists, I confess to being rather surprised at the purpose of Fr. Paris's letter, which is to request me to give the precise reference in St. Thomas, "the heretic must not be argued with but incontinently put to death". Fr. Paris goes on to remark that this surely only applies to "obstinate heretics" and if taken in isolation, might not "sufficiently express St. Thomas's mind thereon".

St. Thomas on Heretics

Below, I propose to examine in some detail, Fr. Paris's remarkable phrase, "obstinate heretics". But first of all, let us find out what the "Angelic Doctor" *did* actually say. In the gigantic corpus of Catholic theology edited by J. P. Migne (Paris 1841), one finds two bulky volumes (each of around 1,000 pages) devoted to the complete Latin text of this great pillar of Catholic orthodoxy. The work is a standard one edited by Catholic theologians, and Fr. Paris presumably knows it. In Book Two of this massive compendium of Catholic theology entitled *Summa Theologica* (Outline of Theology), St. Thomas deals at length with the whole question of heresy: pages 103-110 *quaestio XI*—divided into sections under the omnibus heading, *De Haeresi*. In this section of his theological encyclopedia, St. Thomas analyses the whole subject of heresy in minute detail and a laborious logic which one can fairly comment would have won universal applause had it only been devoted to a more scientific theme than the oriental myths of the New Testament.

in Article Three, explicitly entitled "*Utrum Haeretici sint Tolerandi*" (Whether heretics should be tolerated), he compares them with forgers, much to their disadvantage, since "it is a far graver crime to corrupt the Faith, which is the life of the soul, than even to forge money

which only affects this temporal life". As Fr. Paris no doubt knows, this passage of his fellow Dominican, St. Thomas, concludes: "*Unde si falsarii pecuniae vel aui malefactores statim per saeculares principes juste morti traduntur, multo magis haeretici statim ex quo de haeresi convincuntur possunt non solum excommunicari sed et juste occidi*" ("Accordingly, if forgers and/or other criminals are immediately and justly condemned to death by order of the secular magistrates, so with much greater reason as soon as they have been convicted of heresy ought not only to be excommunicated, but incontinently [or immediately—*statim*] be justly put to death". Book Two

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

## Reply to a Priest

By F. A. RIDLEY

*Summa Theologica*, p 107.

After which explicit statement, St. Thomas continues his laborious investigation into the precise conditions under which heretics may be "reconciled" to the "one true Church". Briefly, what he says amounts to this: the heretic may be spared and admitted to penance *once*, but the "relapsed" heretic, that is, what Fr. Paris in his letter terms an "obstinate" heretic, has sinned beyond redemption and must suffer the final penalty. "Relapsed" heretics, it should be noted, were *always* burned alive by the Inquisition.

So much for St. Thomas himself. I must, however, apologise to the Reverend Father for an inadvertent slip of the pen. In my original article, I misquoted St. Thomas as writing: "the heretic must not be argued with" etc., whereas what he actually said (as noted above) was: "must not only be excommunicated", etc. However, this alteration constitutes a distinction without any real difference, since the medieval Church forbade Christians to have any kind of intercourse, including presumably, arguments with excommunicated people.

What is an "Obstinate" Heretic?

So much for St. Thomas! Now let us turn to Fr. Paris himself. For in his letter to me, this modern Dominican states: "I think St. Thomas was speaking about the 'obstinate' heretic". Now precisely what does this mean? A "heretic" is by definition one who rejects the authority of the Catholic Church in matters of faith. As long as he does this he remains a heretic. From the moment however, that he ceases to reject this authority, he ceases to be a heretic. In other words, a heretic is by definition, "obstinate", and there is surely no difference at all, from Fr. Paris's standpoint, between an "obstinate" heretic and a plain one without the adjectival prefix. "Elementary, dear Fr. Paris," as that great master of deductive logic, the Sage of Baker Street, would have concluded. Ergo, St. Thomas Aquinas clearly believed in putting heretics, that is, *bona fide* (obstinate) heretics to death.

A Hoary Chestnut

Fr. Paris concludes his epistle with this p.s.: "As you know, an obstinate heretic in medieval times when the Faith dominated Europe was considered as an enemy of the state, and as such was by the state punishable by

death", etc. To which observation we can only apply the expressive phrase used by our French friends, *vieux renegade*. We have heard that one before. It is a quibble and nothing but a quibble. What is more, a controversialist of Fr. Paris's standing, who appears to read THE FREETHINKER regularly, must surely know that it is a quibble. For in medieval times, in the Ages of Faith, what was the state but an appendage of the Church, and did not the canon law, which *inter alia* ordered the execution of heretics take precedence over the civil law of any and every Catholic state?

Does not Fr. Paris know that no orthodox secular ruler would have dared to spare a heretic handed over to him by the Church? If any secular ruler had refused to punish a duly condemned heretic, he would himself have incurred all the pains and penalties attached to the then supreme crime of heresy, which the Church authorities denounced as far worse than any secular crime. In which connection, has Fr. Paris never heard of recalcitrant medieval kings say, the medieval anti-Christ, the German Emperor Frederick Hohenstaufen (incidentally a cousin of Thomas Aquinas) or of our own King John, who were laid under interdict by the Church for far milder offences in ecclesiastical eyes than heresy? In the Middle Ages, the Church represented the substance; the state, the shadow.

## "Scientology"

THE GOVERNMENT of Victoria recently set up a board of inquiry into "Scientology", after questions had been asked by members of the Victorian State Parliament at Melbourne. The following is some of the evidence which has been heard by the Commissioner, Mr. Kevin Anderson, Q.C., not — be it understood — from patients in an Australian lunatic asylum, but from free citizens walking the streets, riding the trams, buses or trains and making their day-by-day purchases in Melbourne emporiums.

An unemployed school teacher (perhaps it would be desirable for him to change his occupation!) stated that he felt he was Rasputin during a scientology processing session. In another "session" he "seemed to be a German bomber in a raid on Odessa". And he said he had paid four hundred to five hundred pounds for 150 hours of "processing" and a further £182 on "training". He is 23 years of age. Last June another witness took a space trip of 6,000 light years "in a small space craft from a planet called Euripides", getting off on the way to land on another planet, only to be sent to Heaven, where he was "implanted on a pole for five days".

William Robert Rowe, aged 37, also gave evidence, which centred around an incident in a past life, 11,767 years ago. He said that he remembered addressing a crowd in an effort to convince them "to do the right thing". Alas the ungrateful listeners killed him, but somehow or other he managed to get to Heaven, where, so Mr. Rowe asserted, he was held by pressure and could not get out again. This member of the Scientology cult also admits to paying out a very substantial sum of money in payment for "processing" and training — almost six hundred pounds, in fact. A woman told the enquiry that her lumbago stopped after she had been "audited", whilst another enthusiast claimed that "scientology and not his doctor" had cleared up his poisoned leg.

The inquiry, which is continuing, is certainly making interesting, if hilarious reading, but one imagines it is not likely to raise the status, in the Australian Commonwealth, of one L. Ron Hubbard, the founder and world head of Scientology.

ARTHUR O'HALLORAN.

Whilst legal fiction laid it down that the organised killing of heretics must be carried out by the secular state (since churchmen were forbidden themselves to shed blood) when the Church gave the order, the state was obliged under pain of heresy itself, to carry out the order. If Fr. Paris does not know this, we can only respectfully advise the St. Paul's Apologetic Circle on whose behalf (and note—paper) Fr. Paris wrote to me, to take a study course in medieval ideology, preferably a modern one.

## Christian Apologetics

I repeat what I stated in my previous article. Christian apologetics were only effective when, as in the Middle Ages, they had the backing of the secular power, then under the thumb of the Church. St. Thomas (13th century), in the heyday of the ages of faith could not only lay down arguments in defence of the faith, but could confidently rely on them being "irrefutable", since no one was allowed to refute them and remain alive long enough to publish his refutation. Today, deprived of this happy position, apologists really have to apologise! It is no doubt not entirely an accident that without the Inquisition—in its heyday with St. Thomas—even the Vatican Council finds St. Thomas not quite as convincing as formerly and is beginning to look round for rather more modern and really convincing arguments!

## "Simple on a Soap-Box"

SIMPLE ON A SOAP-BOX, by John Lee (Collins, London, 22s. 6d.) is an unusual book written by an unusual man, and is well worth asking for at your local library. John Lee has been described as "the Aneurin Bevan of New Zealand", and he has had an even more varied and adventurous life than the Welshman. He had a wretched and unhappy childhood, which resulted in his being sent to an industrial school for stealing sacks. But this boy of Romany blood found life there too much for his stormy petrel mentality, and he ran away. In fact, he spent his young life escaping, being captured and regularly flogged working in lonely farms—and always on the run from the police.

Then, in World War One he joined the first Expeditionary Force—not from patriotic motives, but chiefly because his workmates were joining up too; and it was in the trenches that he started his writing—an unusual school for an author.

After the war Lee returned to New Zealand with a DCM but without his left forearm. He then found that he had another gift to add to his writing—that of speaking with force and clarity. In fact he was a brilliant orator, and the New Zealand Labour Party grabbed this recruit. At 22 he became the youngest MP in the New Zealand Parliament. But the socialism he preached was too much for many of his party, whose creed was based on an old hymn—"I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me". John Lee's hatred of cant and humbug, his refusal to alter his political opinions to the dictation of the men of his own party and to become a lackey of the Roman Catholic Church — which wielded big political power in New Zealand life — led to his defeat after eight years.

So, he turned to writing, *Children of the Poor*, *Civilian into Soldier*, *Shining with the Shiner* and *The Hunted* being among the best known of his books.

Now, we have *Simple on a Soap-box*, which makes equally good reading.

F. A. HORNIBROOK

# The Cathedral and the Freethinker

By F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

A GREAT deal has been said during the last few years about the new cathedral built by the Church of England at Guildford in Surrey. Its history had been difficult and chequered. After the diocese of Guildford was formed in 1926, moves were made to provide it with a cathedral and work began on a building at the top of Stag Hill, just outside the town. But the war put a stop to work on the building and it was not until a few years ago that it recommenced in earnest. Finally, in 1962, the large new church was ready for entry and use. After a preliminary dispute over the appointment to the deanery, a great service of consecration was held. Archbishops and bishops appeared in plenty, radio and television did their part, and the first entirely new Anglican cathedral to appear in the south of England since the Reformation was launched on its way. Guildford Cathedral became noted as a showplace; the visits of tourists and the like were widely canvassed. A new publicity sensation had been added to the life of the Church of England.

It was a chilly day in spring when the present writer made his way up Stag Hill. The many reports had often prompted his curiosity to visit the cathedral, and the opportunity had at last arrived. It stands outside the town, high and bare, on a lofty eminence. Much of the land around is open country. At the top, a fresh wind was blowing which made tempting the cafe-hut run by the cathedral near to the main door. It was circumstances of weather which prompted an inquiry about visitors to be made to the cafe manageress. The question was not well received. In fact, the answer left the impression that congregations at the ordinary services are probably sparse to a degree, and that full attendances are only obtained from groups of diocesan visitors or tourists and sightseers.

The building is of yellow brick moulded from local clay blended with concrete. Inside, it gives the impression of both height and length. Indeed, it would be ungenerous not to admit that there is a traditional grandeur about the lofty nave. The chancel is traditional in style, as is a chapel dedicated to the local regiment and decorated with its flags. Dignified ornamentation marked the baptistry whilst there is a little good stained glass, the gift of donors, and some striking modern carved statuary. But, impressions were mixed. In some ways, there had been a not unsuccessful effort to catch the spirit of the Gothic tradition, yet concrete kept breaking in, giving the lasting impression of something new and untraditional. Gothic translated into concrete might chime in with South Bank religion, but the cathedral building seemed to demonstrate the hiatus between the traditional religion and modern knowledge. Workmen are still building a lady chapel, presumably to house the diocesan Mothers' Union, and in various spots were prominent appeals for funds to pay for the great undertaking.

As one walks away from the cathedral, one was bound to ask what it all implied. For most of the week, visitors were obviously few and services very thinly attended. It could not be pleaded that, like a Roman Catholic abbey, it had an internal religious life of its own. A very moderate Anglicanism seemed to rattle round inside the Gothic architecture, as does a dried nut inside its shell. Clearly, a very large sum of money had been spent to create something which might be a showplace but was in very grave danger of being a white elephant. One wonders what will

be the situation in a few years' time when the novelty has worn off, when the building no longer attracts the casual tourist, and when the diocese finds itself saddled for good with a vast church whose comparative inaccessibility cuts it off from the main flow of traffic. A great deal of begging has taken place and various bodies of people have given munificent gifts. For example, one very fine piece of stained glass was given by barristers, solicitors and physiotherapists—a somewhat strange combination. It is easy to imagine how complete newness will attract gifts of this kind. But again one wonders how many of the donors are really active members of the Church of England, and whether gifts will continue to any extent when the novelty has gone. It is not impossible already to envisage the response of the ordinary churchman when, faced already with the upkeep of his own parish church, appeal is also made to his pocket to help pay for the running of the new cathedral. Again, men and materials are badly needed for new housing projects. Possibly, the housing situation has never been worse than it has appeared during recent years. The building of a great cathedral in a country where many are still homeless and where housing scarcity is a social problem does not create the best type of impression upon the world at large.

The great cathedrals of the Middle Ages were the contemporary expression of ecclesiastical power within a feudal economy. Designed to glorify the Church and its teaching, they were the work of the craftsmen whom the ecclesiastics employed. As Dr. Coulton showed in his *Art and the Reformation*, their upkeep was a burden upon the feudal economy. Vast endowments were gathered and the Church thus became one of the greater landowners. But the Middle Ages are not the modern world. The ages of faith are over and a society more or less secularised stands over against the ecclesiastical claims. As the recent report by Mr. Paul shows, the Church of England not only has its problems of dogma and theology. It is archaic in its machinery and largely unrelated to the emerging social outlooks of the day. Such writing as that of the Bishop of Woolwich is an indication of the extent to which it finds itself in overwhelming difficulties of belief and of creed. A new cathedral can have little relationship to the life of the times. It bears no analogy to the centuries which produced the great Gothic piles of Winchester and Salisbury, of Lichfield or of Durham. On the contrary, there is something pathetic about a Gothic style reproduced in concrete. The two materials represent totally dissimilar traditions. One is the architecture which was used in North-Western Europe to interpret the ages of faith into building related to the age. The other belongs to an architecture of the twentieth century, to human utilitarianism and its outcome. Guildford Cathedral is an attempt to speak the ideas of the past in the language of the twentieth century and, for this reason, has already the nemesis of failure lingering around it.

The secularist pilgrim reached the bottom of Stag Hill and looked back. A cold rain was beating upon the yellow bricks, and the building stood remote and lonely on its eminence. Traffic moved along the road some distance away, passing it by. Such is the fate of a cathedral in the twentieth century!

WITHOUT COMMENT

Girls from Lourdes get Typhoid.

—Headline, *Daily Telegraph* (29/4/64)

## This Believing World

That well-known figure in the Christian world, Dr. Nathaniel Micklem, gave his views on Christianity on BBC TV the other evening, and may well have caused believing Christians more than a few heartaches. Among quite a number of "heresies" he insisted that Jesus was never a Christian; that a good deal of what he said was difficult to understand these days; and that Paul for the most part was quite unintelligible. But of course Jesus was "God made man" not just a man.

★

Dr. Micklem however claimed that the story of "the woman taken in adultery" was genuine, in spite of its being rejected by the Revised Version. In general, its defenders argue in a circle. It was so like Jesus not to condemn the lady; and this prompts one to ask the question how do we know what he was like? And the answer comes pat—because he let the lady off! The truth is that the story is not found in some of the most ancient manuscripts and is obviously a late forgery.

★

Perhaps the nearest present-day approach to the pious and silly Victorian tracts is the "Saturday Reflection" in the London *Evening News*, the writer of which displays an astonishing credulity. As was to be expected, he repeated at Easter that the Resurrection is one of the best attested facts in history! And he is just as confident about eternal life, because belief in it is "universal". It became a "certainty" when "our Lord rose from the dead". One cannot argue against this kind of nonsense. One can only wonder that anyone can write it in 1964.

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But just as silly is the belief—the "certainty"—that the return of Christ is imminent. This is the claim of the Christadelphians who have invaded Clapham, and who are awaiting "Armageddon" according to innumerable "prophecies" from the Bible. But Jesus appears to be constantly held up. Still, a dear little miracle may overcome all delays and the hope of millions of good Christians may still be fulfilled—to enjoy eternal life safe in the arms of Jesus.

★

In the meantime there seems to be very strong disunity in Amersham with "the town protesting to the archbishop about the rector", as the *Daily Mail* records (April 20th). It appears that the townspeople are furious with the rector for sacking his curate. The two parsons, the Rev. A. Campbell and the Rev. H. Caunter, are at loggerheads because among other things, Mr. Caunter was "unco-operative"; and a deputation was told that Mr. Campbell "was right under ecclesiastical law". "Maybe Church law is right", declared a disgruntled member of the church, "but we think he is quite wrong". How very, very difficult it is to achieve perfect unity!

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In spite of the Biblical injunction that population should increase and multiply, the Rev. Dr. S. Snow, vicar of Bognor Regis, would like family allowances to be paid for only two children. If this were done, he thinks, (*Daily Express* April 20th) that the population could be checked. If the population increases at the present rate, he declared, "it will be standing room only by 2260—including the peaks of every mountain in the world". Dr. Snow is lucky in living now; had he uttered the same admonition in 1877 when Charles Bradlaugh was sentenced to six months—he did not serve them—and said much the same thing when advocating his Neo-Malthusianism, we shudder to think what would have happened.

## What the Blind Read

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND, founded in 1882, is sited at 35 Great Smith Street, London, S.W.1. Of course, one thinks, Braille. But it is curious and revealing that sighted experts of Braille, who work in the library, think it simpler to read Braille by sight rather than by touch. However, blind readers who find Braille too difficult have the choice of Moon, an embossed formalised alphabet of capitals. One can learn to read Moon in an hour.

How many Londoners have heard of Moon, and what a little we know about the problems of unsighted readers. I asked Dr. William Mumford, who had experience with ordinary public libraries before he took over supervision of London's library for the blind, if he felt that the unsighted get as much enjoyment from a book as we do. He believes it is possible that the blind, who may be less distracted and whose recreations are more limited, may even enjoy a book more than a sighted reader.

What do they want to read? The wrong way to answer this question is to presume terms of compensation and imagine blind people preferring books with colourful passages or descriptions of the fast action in which they can no longer participate. The right way to answer the question is in age-groups.

You see in an ordinary town one quarter of the population might be children, one quarter old folk, and one half the inhabitants men and women from the ages of 15 to 60. There are approximately 100,000 blind citizens registered in England; and if one put them into one town, one would find that one tenth of the population would be children, and more than half old folk. The truth is that few children in this country today are born blind; blindness is mainly a handicap of old age.

The majority of unsighted readers then have perhaps some preference for slightly old-fashioned books, but this is only due to age-group distribution in readership. The blind really like to read what we like to read. There is not much call for career books in a library for the blind, but this again is only because of age-group statistics. Today there is a variety of occupations and professions for the blind — lawyers, musicians, professors, etc.; but the majority are too old to think of careers.

The unsighted through the old-age handicap have a strong visual memory of their days as sighted people over as many years as would have been reckoned a full life-span in the 18th century. They want to keep their memories vivid and they want to follow the book reviews. So in Great Smith Street they issue a bulletin which reprints, in Braille or Moon, reviews from the leading newspapers and periodicals.

In the main, blind readers are amazingly cheerful. "Of course," Dr. Mumford confided, "we have some who are occasionally cantankerous. Generally, if they have off-days and complain unreasonably about a book, I say, 'Now you wouldn't be pulling the leg of a poor sighted man, would you?' That goes down well, and we have a chat about some author we both admire."

Personally, I think this little joke is a splendid pointer to the courage of unsighted readers and maybe it is as good an excuse as any to introduce a small "commercial" plea for sighted readers to remember, when they are considering the possibilities of donations to good causes, the work which is done in London to give the blind what the blind want to read.

# THE FREETHINKER

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THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 17s. 6d.; half-year, 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d. In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.25, half-year, \$2.75; three months, \$1.40.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Inquiries regarding Bequests and Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.  
London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. A. MILLAR.  
(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: MESSRS. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.  
Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street.) Sunday Evenings  
Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.  
North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.  
Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

The Parish Church, Pattenham, (nr Guildford), Friday, May 15th, 8 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE, "Better Values or Lost Values?"

## Notes and News

JUDGING FROM the letters we have received, our decision to let "Shakespeare speak for himself" on his quatercentenary met with approval. And quite a few readers liked the First Folio title-page reproduction. Having made these few acknowledgments we intend to say no more. We value the contributions of Reginald Underwood and don't wish him to be "Shakespeared" to death.

"God is the butcher", says John Osborne's Luther in the Peasants' Revolt scene. And: "They were a mob, a mob, and if they hadn't been held down and slaughtered, there'd have been a thousand more tyrants instead of half-a-dozen". Luther, a religious revolutionary himself—though perhaps a rather reluctant one—was indeed horrified by the revolt. Examples of Luther's own words were given in *The Economist's* (11/4/64) review of *Luther and the Reformation* by V. H. H. Green (Batsford 30s.). "It is God, not man, who hangs and breaks on the wheel, decapitates and flogs: it is God who wages war". And: "I will always side with him, however unjust, who endures rebellion and against him who rebels, however justly".

IN THE first of BBC-2's *Conversations for Tomorrow* (25/4/64). A. J. Ayer and Sir Isaiah Berlin were the guests of J. B. Priestley who, to judge from his horror of men being ruled by machines, seemed to have taken science fiction a little too seriously. Mr. Priestley also argued that man was not just the product of heredity and environment, but of these two plus "an X-factor". And, without defining this—which he admitted he couldn't do—he invited Professor Ayer to disprove it. The Professor smiled, wondering perhaps, as we did, what would be the next synonym for soul.

"EVERYBODY knows the professional non-believers, who make a point of propaganda by shocking people", wrote Atticus in *The Sunday Times* (26/4/64). And he listed

Bertrand Russell, Professor A. J. Ayer, Dr. Francis Crick and—yes—Sir Julian Huxley as "aggressive in their anti-Christianity". But, he went on, there are other "more unexpected people" on the Advisory Council of the British Humanist Association. Four MPs, for instance, including Richard Crossman and Arthur Creech Jones, though no Conservatives ("We're all C of E here", said the Conservative Central Office). Neither Lord Willis, Lord Llewelyn-Davies, nor Lady Gaitskill took the oath in the House of Lords, and Atticus felt he could "now say" that both Hugh Gaitskill and Aneurin Bevan were "assumed by their friends to be agnostic in their views". We are tempted to speculate if Mr. Harold Wilson will also be posthumously raised to the status of unbeliever.

THE BBC is "said to have many agnostics among its top management" (certainly it has many at other levels) but, in Atticus's words few of the high-ups are "mad or brave enough to admit it". Michael Peacock, Head of BBC-2 "prefers" to describe himself as "a lapsed Christian, but not proud of it . . . not an active non-believer". The Civil Service is "equally tricky" and the only two declared Humanists that Atticus could find were Dr. Peter Henderson at the Ministry of Health and Sir Gilbert Flemming, Permanent Under-secretary at the Ministry of Education. Atticus hoped to find that it was now "respectable"—not "right, or virtuous, or desirable"—not to believe in God. After a week of telephone inquiries he had to conclude it isn't.

IN HIS journey "Round the Constituences" for the *New Statesman*, Richard West recently (24/4/64) visited Preston, a town which, with 40 per cent Roman Catholics, has, he said, "learned a certain tolerance". It was the ruling Labour group on the Council—said Mr. West, illustrating his point—"who turned down the Cromwell Society's request to put up a plaque to that great Protestant on the bridge where he crossed to victory". Why? For fear of Catholic intolerance?

ROGER PEYREFITTE's brilliant novel about life in a Roman Catholic boarding school, *Special Friendships*, has now been published as a paperback (Panther Books, 3s. 6d.). The author "goes too far", *The Observer* said, in his attack on Catholic education, often using a scalpel where a butter knife would have done . . . Well, that's a matter of opinion, but we can agree with *The Observer* that "it's tremendously good all the same".

ON MAY 10th, at 3 p.m. in the Library of the South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, London, there will be a musical programme, "Flowers and Gardens", at which the Guests of Honour will be Mr. and Mrs. G. C. Dowman. Mr. Dowman is relinquishing his editorship of the *SPES Monthly Record*, and it is hoped that as many of his friends as possible will attend this farewell party. Tea will be served at 3.45 p.m.

THE SECOND Annual Conference of the British Humanist Association is to be held at Nottingham University from July 24th-27th, on the theme, "Humanism and the Scientific Revolution". The speakers will be Dr. F. M. George on "The Next Thirty Years", Mr. A. G. Ling, FRIBA, on "The City of the Future", Dr. James Heming on "Values in an Age of Technology", and Mr. Leslie T. Wilkins on "A Projection of Some Sociological Trends". Non-members may attend and further details can be obtained from the Secretary, British Humanist Association, 40 Drury Lane, London, W.C.2.

# The Roman Catholic School System In USA

By ADRIAN PIGOTT

IN THE USA a public school is a government undenominational school, whereas a parochial school is one which is controlled and administered by a religious body.

Strictly speaking, Roman Catholic parents may not send their children to non-Catholic schools because Canon Law 1374 declares it to be "a grave sin which cannot receive absolution without proper adjustment". Owing to local difficulties, however, this canon often has to be winked at, and many Catholic parents, in fact, deliberately send their children to non-Catholic schools because of the superior education they provide.

The drawbacks of the Roman Catholic educational system may be summarised as follows; the low grade of teachers; the shortage of teachers; the unsuitable curriculum; the aloofness between teachers and pupils; and the suppression of the pupil's initiative.

Hitherto Roman Catholic schools have generally been staffed by monk/nun teachers, many of whom were quite unfitted to equip their pupils to cope properly with worldly problems. However, they are cheap: a nun-teacher only costs £280 a year which is paid to her convent. Today, however, the supply of monk and nun teachers is drying up, and large numbers of lay teachers (requiring at least £1,000 a year) will soon have to be engaged, causing a serious financial problem to the Church. This is one reason for the insistent Catholic demands for more of the taxpayers' money with which to maintain their parochial schools.

Less than half the teachers in Catholic schools have a degree (which is compulsory for teachers at the public schools) and many of the unqualified young Catholic lay teachers spend their holidays studying for degrees.

As in Britain, the shortage of teachers results in an overloading of pupils in the classes. The American government has laid down 25 as the maximum number of pupils for one teacher to deal with successfully. However, the Catholic parochial schools flout this rule, and their national average is as much as 46—manifestly too high for good results. Nevertheless, because of the increasing numbers of Roman Catholic children, this is another matter to which the authorities have to turn a blind eye. Cases have even been reported of schools with as many as 70 and 80 pupils per class.

One important failing of the curriculum is the undue emphasis laid on religion, a large amount of time being spent on prayers, repetitive chantings and lives of obscure saints who died centuries ago—to the exclusion of more useful worldly subjects. This religious tendency permeates the whole school, even managing to reach the mathematics class. Here is a sample from an American Roman Catholic textbook on Arithmetic:—

If it takes 40,000 priests and 140,000 sisters to care for the 40 million Catholics in USA, how many more priests and sisters will be needed to convert and care for the 100 million non-Catholics?

The textbooks which are recommended are listed in the *Catholic Educator*, but there have been numerous complaints from honest Romanists about the way in which they are "slanted". One critic complained to the National Catholic Educational Association about "strained history", and he quoted an extract from a history book which pretended that the original Pilgrim Fathers were, in reality, secret Catholic converts! This is the sort of nonsense which is being pumped into the minds of America's young Roman Catholics. In fact, ex-Romanist

Emmett McLoughlin considers that the parochial school where he was educated, whilst producing rigidity of thought, did not teach him *how* to think.

Young Romanists are taught to regard their religious teachers as holy; as differing from other mortals. This results in a regrettable lack of spontaneous friendliness between teacher and pupil which is so useful for the formation of a child's character. This pseudo-sanctity merely defeats its own ends, because pupils hesitate to discuss their little problems with someone who is believed by them to be set on a level higher than that of ordinary people.

I once talked to a lapsed English Romanist who told me that in her convent days, the pupils genuinely believed that the nuns were so different from other people that it was unnecessary for them ever to go to the lavatory!

The Roman Catholic Church is a conservative body which dislikes changes, and it is slow to learn lessons from its failures—or to correct them. Many of its educational methods are out of date, but they still continue, because the ruling cardinals apparently do not listen to the lay experts who are better aware of the errors which are being committed.

Here are two instances culled from an American magazine of 1963:—

The school superintendent of the Catholic diocese of Syracuse (NY State), lashed out at the Catholic schools for failing to teach pupils how to analyse and how to think. He said that there was a dearth of Catholic leaders in USA and suggested that wrong methods were being used in the parochial schools. The president of Notre Dame University asked "Why must we always be the last to initiate anything imaginative and intellectual? Yet we are the first in Anti-Communism, Bingo and Old Clothes Drives. I fear that our American Catholic spirit has been characterised by a narrow parochial spirit, an isolationist complex and an Anti-UNO urge.

Many reasonable Roman Catholics and American politicians are fully aware of the low quality of the Catholic educational system. However, very little can be done to correct its faults. The Catholic laymen rarely criticise their clergy who administer the schools; and, as far as the politicians are concerned, anything Roman Catholic is "a hot potato". Twenty-two per cent of the American electorate are Romanists (most of whom will docilely vote as directed by their priests). It is only a very bold politician, therefore, who will dare to criticise anything connected with "the Holy Church".

Bernard Shaw once stated that "a Roman Catholic University is a contradiction in terms"—and this applies to much of the indifferent education now being supplied at lower levels by the Roman Catholic Church.

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

to be held in the Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate,  
Leicester (by kind permission of the  
Leicester Secular Society)

The NSS Executive Committee invites delegates  
and friends to

RECEPTION AND SOCIAL  
in the Secular Hall on Saturday,  
May 16th, at 7 p.m.

### THE CONFERENCE (for Members only)

will be held on Sunday, May 17th  
at 10 a.m.—12.30 p.m. and 2 p.m.—4.30 p.m.

to be followed by an  
OPEN AIR MEETING

# God and Meaning

By G. L. SIMONS

FOR FRUITFUL debate between believer and unbeliever it is essential that "God" be given a meaning. Some philosophers, e.g. the logical positivists, have denied that this can be done. They have, however, only considered attempts to define "God" in transcendent terms. It may be possible to arrive at a definition well-grounded in normal human experience.

Language has evolved from primitive pre-human communication to modern complexity. Initially its purpose was simply to convey simple sensory impressions; at this level it was related directly to the physical world. Later, when man's imagination grew, it became possible to conceive and communicate abstract ideas. It seems highly probable that these concepts grew directly out of an awareness of the physical universe; similarly with the language used to denote the concepts.

I suggest, therefore, that since language has developed with biological evolution it cannot denote anything that does not relate directly or indirectly to the physical world. This means that a suitable test of meaning is whether a word denotes a sense impression, or whether it denotes a concept that can be defined in terms of words that denote sense impressions. Abstract words that satisfy this criterion are thus shown to have meaning. If it is supposed to be a characteristic of a word (I am, of course, referring to nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives — not to conjunctions and prepositions which have a different purpose) that it cannot be related to the physical world then such a word is meaningless (unless it is a plain negation, e.g. "non-empirical"). This seems to follow from the way in which language has evolved.

Hence it can be shown that most metaphysical words are without meaning. (The conclusions of the positivist seem to be true, even though his arguments, e.g. those involving the verification principle, have been subject to heavy criticism.) But it may be objected that the above criterion of meaning is not a satisfactory one. Dogs, for example, can assign words meaning even though such creatures cannot use words or define them. But it is quite apparent that this objection makes no attempt to establish a non-empirical criterion of meaning. However, it has motivated certain philosophers to say (by way of preference) that to behave appropriately when a word is used is to know what the word means. According to this criterion, religious people in some sense know what religious jargon means, since it is associated with certain types of behaviour (which may be called appropriate), e.g. Church-going, praying, fasting, etc. But what is the sense in which, according to this criterion, religious people attribute meaning to religious jargon? Let us, for example, consider the word "praying."

The word is intended by religious people to denote some sort of communication with a "transcendent" being. But since we have suggested that language cannot, because of its inherent nature, have a non-empirical reference, this usage is untenable. If "praying" is to mean "communication," then it must be communication with an empirical being, a transcendent one being nonsensical.

The religious person may, however, albeit unintentionally, attribute a much more trivial meaning to the injunction "pray!" — it may merely mean "kneel down, close your eyes and say some words as if you were talking to someone." This sort of interpretation would give religious jargon a meaning, although not the one

required by pious folk. That they would be dissatisfied is obvious and so there is only one path open to them. They must define religious terms in an empirical way such that the terms acquire some of the meaning desired. For example, "pray!" must mean more than "kneel down . . ." It must mean "communicate with a being" and since a transcendent one is ruled out, an empirical one will have to do. This involves defining God, for example, in an empirical way. There are two ways in which this can be done.

Firstly, "God" may merely denote a being who inhabits Mars, say, who has great scientific ability and a capacity to interfere in human affairs. If such a being existed and could, for example, create life, achieve immortality, monitor all human experiences, it could be conveniently designated "God." This type of being is a possibility and could fulfil many divine requirements.

Secondly, less trivially, perhaps, God may be a much more obscure scientific concept. There may exist wave-motions, force-fields, sub-atomic particles of a type at present unknown. These may be organised in a complex aggregate capable of purposeful activity. It is possible that such a weird array could experience emotion, and act upon the world with intent. If we ever discover any such thing it could quite satisfactorily be called "God."

Both these concepts of God are meaningful. They are in line with our scientific concept of the world. That is not to say, of course, that there is any reason to suggest that God (conceived in either of these ways) exists. But he is a possibility. I contend that the above suggestions for a meaningful god are logically tenable; such a being may exist — we have no reason to think that he does, but we may have reason when science is a few years (or centuries) older, and this is all I am suggesting.

Both the suggested concepts are empirical. They are capable, in principle, of scientific investigation, and they are limited by natural law. Neither of these concepts leads to a being who "transcends" the natural world. Both signify a being who is part of it. This is what is meant by an empirical concept of God. It may horrify religious people but I believe that no other interpretation can possibly be true — it cannot even acquire meaning.

If religious folk are dissatisfied with this conclusion they must produce a criterion of meaning which is non-empirical, and which can indicate how non-empirical words can significantly enter a language which has developed with biological evolution. I believe that because religious people are unable to do this their case is untenable.

## OBITUARY

It is with deep regret that we announce the death on April 16th, in hospital, of Arthur Dale Hodgkinson, Secretary of the Chester Branch of the National Secular Society. A secular service was held at Birkenhead on May 20th.

Mr. Hodgkinson, who was 74, had been a life-long Free-thinker and was one of Chester's most respected citizens. A former secretary of the local branch of USDAW, he also served for many years on committees of the Labour and Co-operative movements.

A widower, Mr. Hodgkinson is survived by his two daughters, to whom we extend our deepest sympathy.

W.J.McI.

We regret to announce the death, on April 8th, in Alassio, Italy, of William Alexander Flack, an old subscriber to this paper. The cremation took place on April 12th.

## CATHOLIC MAYOR VETOES BIRTH-CONTROL FUNDS

THE SAN FRANCISCO Medical Society—with the exception of its Catholic members—has strongly and justly condemned a veto by the city's Roman Catholic Mayor of \$10,840 birth control funds for San Francisco General Hospital. Mayor John F. Shelley denied that his decision had anything to do with religion and said it was "a matter of economy". But, as a reader of the *San Francisco Chronicle* remarked, it was "remarkable that in a budget totalling millions, the Mayor should have pounced on one \$10,000 item". And, in an excellent editorial (13/4/64), the *Chronicle* itself advised Mayor Shelley to restore the family-planning allowance to the city budget.

While it would be improper to oblige women leaving the Hospital's obstetrical ward to accept birth-control information, the *San Francisco Chronicle* said, "it is certainly proper and indeed a responsibility of a public health department, to make these available on voluntary request". And Dr. Elgin Orcutt, Professor of the University of California Medical School and chief of the obstetrics and gynaecology department of the General Hospital, has stated that 85 per cent of the 2,000 women who came to the hospital last year for post-natal care pleaded for advice and help on preventing unwanted pregnancies. "The right of the secular government to advise such women about family planning and to supply them with contraceptive devices, if their consciences do not forbid the acceptance of these devices, seems to us beyond question", the *Chronicle* commented. And, it asked, what would be the reaction of the public "if the Catholic Church's rule against the eating of meat on abstinent days should become the excuse for agitation for a law to forbid restaurants to serve meat to anyone on Friday?"

### NEW PAPERBACKS

#### Penguins

- The Penguin Science Survey, 1964 A  
Edited by Arthur Garrett, 7s. 6d.  
The Penguin Science Survey, 1964 B  
Edited by S. A. Barnett and Anne McLaren 7s. 6d.  
Physical Fitness 5BX and 6BX Exercise Plans 2s. 6d.  
Arabian Sands by Wilfred Thesiger 6s.  
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The Rise of the South African Reich by Brian Bunting 4s. 6d.  
Which Way Africa? The Search for a New Society  
by Basil Davidson 4s.  
Traffic in Towns—The Buchanan Report 10s. 6d.  
The Police by Ben Whitaker 3s. 6d.  
What's Wrong with Hospitals by Gerda Cohen 3s. 6d.

#### Classic

Voltaire: Zadig and L'Ingénu 3s. 6d.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### HUMANISM AND TRAGEDY

I quite agree with Colin McCall that we can be entertained and moved by a play without sharing its viewpoint, but there are plays and plays, and Shakespeare's tragedies are unique works of genius. We therefore get a little more than entertainment value from them. In *Hamlet* the main theme of the play is death. In fact, *Hamlet* is the ambassador of death walking amid life. The whole play from start to finish is pressing on *Hamlet* to his final doom. Here we see the tragic rhythm of a man's life at his highest powers of reflection in the limits of his unique, death-bound career. That is the essence of tragedy.

The main theme of the play has nothing in common with the ideals of Humanism. No Humanist could ever agree with *Hamlet's* attitude towards life and still remain a Humanist. Humanists cannot get away from the fact that life is a ceaseless battle with death, to which we are approaching nearer and nearer every day.

The paramount reality of our actual daily life is founded on the secret grasp each man has of his own mortality. However a Humanist defines his awareness of death, he cannot avoid its conceptual and emotive impact. It is the sovereign condition of human existence that the paramount reality transcends all. A tragic view of life is incompatible with Humanism.

R. SMITH.

[Colin McCall writes: *Tragedy turns into comedy in Mr. Smith's hands, I am sorry I can't take him or his "paramount reality" seriously. I propose, then, not to interrupt his "ceaseless battle with death", except to say that (a) he grossly oversimplifies Hamlet, and (b) death doesn't make life tragic, it only makes it finite.—ED].*

### TITHE

In This Believing World (24/4/64), you quote the Rev. W. Snow as saying that "religion should be paid for by weekly contributions", and that everybody who wants religion should be forced to contribute. Tithe-payers are still paying whether they be Jews, Catholics or Atheists, and whether they want religion or not. I paid on a farm in Rochester, Kent, until my retirement in 1953.

W. OSTLER.

The Crimes of the Popes (A chapter from *The Crimes of Christianity* by G. W. Foote and J. M. Wheeler) Price 6d. postage 3d.

### Pelicans

- The Church of England by Paul Ferris 4s. 6d.  
The Greeks Overseas by John Boardman 6s.  
Introducing Mathematics Vol. 1, by W. W. Sawyer 5s.  
Inventing the Future by Dennis Gabor 4s.

### Peregrines

- The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910-1923,  
Edited by Max Brod 18s. 6d.  
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Symposium of Plato 6s.  
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## TWO DATES FOR FREETHINKERS

Tuesday, May 19th, 7.45 p.m.  
FREETHOUGHT AND HUMANISM IN  
SHAKESPEARE

Lecture: DAVID TRIBE : : Readings: JOAN MILLER  
Songs: KATHLEEN EWART  
Accompanist: ANNA SLOAN  
Introduced by RICHARD AINLEY  
ALLIANCE HALL, PALMER STREET, S.W.1  
(next to Caxton Hall), two minutes St. James's Park  
underground station.)  
Tickets 2s. 6d.

Sunday, June 7th, 2.30 p.m.

UNVEILING OF THOMAS PAINE STATUE  
AT THETFORD

Coach leaves Central London 9.45 a.m.  
Return Fare and Tea, £1 1s.

Book immediately for both events through—  
THE SECRETARY,

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London, S.E.1, or telephone HOP 2717